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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ZAGREB 001035

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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR AND CROATIAN PRESIDENT DISCUSS

ATTENDANCE AT THE NON-ALIGNED MOVEMENT SUMMIT IN HAVANA

REF: ZAGREB 1017

Classified By: DCM Greg Delawie for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: The Ambassador urged President Mesic to consider a gesture in support of democratic change in Cuba during his September visit to Havana for the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit. Mesic emphasized his purpose was a visit to the NAM meeting, not to Cuba itself. He will make general reference to democracy in his NAM statement, but would not single out Cuba for criticism. Mesic explained that his attendance as an observer at the meeting was motivated by historical ties (via Yugoslavia) with the NAM, promoting commercial links with NAM attendees, and lobbying for a non-permanent seat on the UNSC. Mesic also emphasized that his interest in the NAM did not signal an interest in NAM membership, and he restated the priority of Croatia's Euro-Atlantic integration.

12. (C) Ambassador and DCM met with Croatian President Stjepan Mesic August 29 to discuss the president's upcoming visit to Havana for the NAM Summit. Mesic was accompanied by Presidential foreign policy advisor Budimir Loncar.

13. (C) In relaying USG concerns about Mesic's attendance at the NAM Summit, the Ambassador clarified that the US was not engaged in a campaign against the NAM; the USG has excellent relations with many leading NAM countries. However, this time the NAM Summit is taking place in Cuba, and that is a problem. Cuba is not a democracy, has no free press or elections, and holds political prisoners. It is hard for the USG to understand how a distinguished human rights and democracy advocate such as Mesic could visit Cuba under these circumstances. That said, it was Mesic's right to determine how he should promote Croatia's interests, and where he should travel.

14. (C) The Ambassador asked Mesic to consider seriously how to use his visit to promote democracy and a peaceful transition in Cuba. He asked that the president speak out on behalf of democratic change while there, or meet with Cuban human rights groups that have met in the past with former Czech President Havel.

15. (C) Mesic responded that he understood US views on his Cuba trip. He explained that via its Yugoslav heritage Croatia has a long and valued history with the NAM, which, in his view, served as a sort of a buffer between the West and the East during the Cold War: this year is the 40th anniversary of the "three-way meeting" (i.e., Tito, Nasser, Nehru) at Tito's Adriatic resort on Brijuni; it is the 45th anniversary of establishment of the NAM in Belgrade. The NAM has been closely linked to Croatia since the beginning, so the NAM remains important to Croatia.

¶6. (C) Mesic said he recognizes that the NAM is a "heterogeneous group," with participants ranging from democrats to dictators. It has no serious ideology any more, but participants do share a common interest in opening markets for trade. Croatian firms' technology has a hard time competing in European markets, but they have found many good markets among NAM countries, so it is important to reinforce trade relationships. He added that Croatia has attended all NAM Summits to date as an observer at the ministerial level; this year the only change is that the head of state would go instead. Croatia will remain an observer at the NAM and has no intention of becoming a member.

¶7. (C) Mesic emphasized that Croatia's strategic goal remains EU and NATO membership; he discusses this publicly constantly. Croatia will implement all the reforms necessary to achieve these goals. Croatia wants good relations with NAM countries that may not share these goals, Mesic continued, but that do share a commitment to peace.

¶8. (C) There are NAM member states where a large number of terrorists are mobilized, Mesic said. During his remarks at the NAM, he plans to emphasize the importance of poverty alleviation as one way of getting at the terrorism problem; dealing with poverty is impossible without the engagement of the democratic part of the world.

¶9. (C) Mesic said he also hopes to lobby NAM member states in favor of Croatia's effort to win a non-permanent seat on the UNSC.

¶10. (C) Mesic noted that he understood the USG's concerns regarding Castro. He was confident that when Castro goes he

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will be replaced by someone else without so much charisma; democracy will be unavoidable without Castro. The next president of Cuba will have a lot of work to do, he noted; while universal education and health care are laudable, the economy there is a disaster.

¶11. (C) Mesic said he does not plan to see Castro while in Havana. He will attend the summit and send out a message of democracy and cooperation. He will avoid meetings with more-radical governments among the attendees. Mesic promised to extend support for democracy in Cuba on another occasion; at the Summit he will speak in favor of democracy and human rights in general, but will not specifically mention Cuba in his remarks. He concluded by assuring the Ambassador that his visit to the NAM would neither hurt the US nor help Castro.

¶12. (C) The Ambassador welcomed Mesic's statement that Croatia had no intention of changing its status at the NAM from that of observer, and that this visit signaled no change in Croatia's Euro-Atlantic orientation. He emphasized that this is an important time of transition for Cuba; we all have an interest in a peaceful transition to democracy on the island, and again urged the president to do whatever he could to help achieve that goal.

¶13. (C) Comment: While the President cites three major motivations for his NAM plans, nostalgia for the Yugoslav glory days in the NAM is clearly predominant. As much as we wish he would not go down this path, this visit is a somewhat quixotic personal choice that represents no change in Croatia's strategic direction of ever-closer integration with the US and Europe, a direction strongly supported by Prime Minister Sanader. The Ambassador will follow up with presidential advisors Budimir Loncar and Tomislav Jakic prior to the visit to continue to press our points regarding support for Cuban democratic reforms.
BRADTKE